

Last week, our nation commemorated National Police Week as well as the 26th Annual National Peace Officers' Memorial Day, to honor the memory of our nation's officers who have fallen in the line of duty and to thank those who carry on their legacy, serving as protectors in communities across this nation.

On Tuesday, the U.S. House recognized the enormous contributions of all those tasked with keeping the peace and protecting the American people by passing the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Improvements Act of 2007. This bill calls for reinvigorating the enormously successful COPS program, which provides critical resources to local law enforcement agencies in order to better protect our communities and combat crime.

Specifically, the legislation calls for adding 50,000 additional police officers on the streets over the next six years and authorizes an increase in the competitive grant funding available for hiring and technology upgrades. Regarding counter-terrorism, the bill explicitly authorizes that COPS hiring grants can be used to hire and train officers to perform "intelligence, anti-terror, or homeland security duties."

In communities across our nation, COPS has been a saving grace, providing critically needed resources for law enforcement efforts, including crime prevention. Created in 1994 to increase police presence on the streets, the COPS program has helped local law enforcement agencies to hire 117,000 additional police officers and/or sheriff deputies nationwide, including 908 additional officers in Maryland's 5th Congressional District.

This program has made a measurable difference throughout the country and here in Southern Maryland. Under COPS, 18 local

and state law enforcement agencies in the 5th District have directly benefited from grant funding. In all, the 5

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District has received almost \$60 million in COPS grants, including more than \$18 million awarded for crime-fighting technologies, such as laptop computers for patrol cars, crime mapping software, and interoperable communications equipment.

Since the establishment of the COPS hiring grant program, the nation has experienced a significant drop in the crime rate – a trend that several independent studies have linked to the increased police presence enabled by the program. A large part of COPS' success is the nation's commitment to community-oriented policing, particularly the program's hiring component which helped get more officers on the beat. This approach was validated by a study by the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office, which stated, "COPS-funded increases in sworn officers per capita were associated with declines in rates of total index crimes, violent crimes, and property crime." According to a GAO study, between 1998 and 2000, COPS grants were responsible for reducing crimes by about 200,000 to 225,000 crimes – one third of which were violent.

Police officers from throughout the 5th District have testified to how critical COPS is to enabling them to effectively combat crime in their communities. Speaking at a press conference in Washington last week, Chief Melvin High of the Prince George's County Police Department stated, "This program is essential for America's police departments to provide the necessary personnel to protect our communities. I can't underscore enough how important this legislation is and how far it will go in providing critical resources to police agencies nationwide."

Unfortunately, over the last few years, the Republican-led Congress sharply reduced the funding for COPS grants, and in 2006, the Congress completely eliminated the hiring grants altogether. It should be noted that at the same time COPS was being

reduced, crime rates began to rise again. In March of 2006, the Police Executive Research Forum released a report that found that violent crimes had risen by double digit percentages over the previous two years.

Among the cities surveyed, since 2005, 71 percent had an increase in homicides, 80 percent saw robberies rise, and 67 percent reported an increase in aggravated assaults with guns. The Fraternal Order of Police has stated, “Just as the decrease in crime was directly related to an increased focus on hiring law enforcement officers at the state and local level, the more recent increase in certain crimes can be directly related to the loss of federal funds supporting state and local

law enforcement.”

There is no doubt that COPS has made a significant difference in communities across the country. The federal government is a committed partner in protecting Americans not only from the threat posed by international terrorism, but also from the dangers posed by domestic crime. This critical legislation is key to equipping law enforcement with the resources they need to combat crime and keep our communities safe. What better way to pay homage to our law enforcement community than by enabling it to more effectively protect our communities and keep our streets free from crime.

